

Connections

Michigan Foster Care Review Board Program

Advocating for Permanency through Reviews and Collaboration

Spring 2002

In Memoriam

Judge Bruce A. Newman

Genesee County Probate Judge Bruce A. Newman died suddenly on December 31, 2001, after collapsing at a dinner party he was attending with his wife. Judge Newman often participated in orientation for new Foster Care Review Board volunteers. Judge Newman was an excellent instructor and presented the role of the court in child welfare cases to new volunteers. Judge Newman also met

frequently with his local review board to discuss the child welfare system and the board's observations. (See related article) Judge Newman was an approachable, dedicated jurist who always focused on the best interests of the children under his jurisdiction. Judge Newman served on the bench in Genesee County since 1989, more recently volunteering to serve in the Family Division of Circuit Court.

Mediation Can Help Move Cases Along

by Cheryl Levine, Ingham Board

(Editorial Note: In addition to being a member of the Ingham FCRB, Cheryl is the Ingham County Permanency Planning Mediation Program Manager)

Foster Care Review Boards in nineteen Michigan counties have an additional service in place designed to move abuse and neglect cases more quickly through the system.

Permanency Planning Mediation (PPM) is mediation ordered by a judge for cases in the Family Division of Circuit Court involving abuse or neglect. PPM provides another tool for case participants to use when trying to achieve permanency for children under court jurisdiction.

PPM isn't for every case, just cases that have something in dispute. PPM isn't only for the permanency planning hearing, permanency planning begins at removal or court intervention. In fact, PPM is helpful at most any point in the court process, with a variety of applications. For instance, at adjudication mediation may help develop the petition wording or help cooperatively develop the initial service plan with the parents. **Mediation isn't intended to divert a case from court intervention.** Foster Care Review Boards regularly review cases that bring seemingly identical case plans and progress reports to subsequent reviews. Mediation is designed to "jump start" this type of case. FCRBs can make recommendations to mediation in their regular reports generated at reviews.

Mediation allows all involved parties to meet in a neutral location and have a discussion, guided by trained mediators, with a goal of a mediated agreement. The mediators help

keep the discussion on topics identified by participants as "sticking points," or things that aren't being worked out satisfactorily utilizing the standard methods. The best interests of the child(ren) are the focus of the mediation.

The mediated agreement is formed by the parties and sent to the judge or referee for approval, modification or disapproval. The agreed upon actions aren't enforceable until judicial approval is received.

So, as boards encounter cases that seem to have the same service plan, or orders that aren't being met for reasons not bad enough to merit termination, a recommendation to mediation may be very helpful.

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GENESEE BOARD MEETS WITH FAMILY COURT JUDGES

by Jean Carl

On November, 14, 2001, the Genesee County Foster Care Review Board met with Family Court Judges Thomas L. Gadola, Bruce A. Newman, Duncan M. Beagle and Joseph J. Farah. The Genesee Board meets annually with its family court judges. These meetings have proven to be productive and appear to have helped maintain an excellent working relationship between the Board and Family Court. Judge Newman (*see related article*) indicated that attorneys who attend Foster Care Review Board hearings are able to submit their expenses as "special fees" which will be honored.

When the Board asked about the effectiveness of the findings and recommendations, the judges indicated that they were aware of the reports and read them. They further stated that the reports have helped them with cases and sometimes with their decisions.

The Judges stated that they meet quarterly with the FIA. Judge Newman indicated a concern that caseworkers do not seem

to understand the concept of due process. Board members suggested legal training be provided to caseworkers with a focus on notices, due process, amending petitions, testifying and preparing for court, and what reports are needed by the court. Discussion also focused on how change of caseworker impacts a case.

Judge Newman requested that the Board indicate in its findings and recommendations if a caseworker is not providing appropriate services to a family. He was concerned about parenting time and believes that visitation one hour per week is inadequate for bonding for a parent with a young child or infant.

Recently, Genesee judges have begun referring cases for permanency planning mediation to Saginaw and Washtenaw counties to get a feel for how the program works. A program in Genesee County may be established when funding is available.

The meeting ended on a positive note, and the Board thanked the judges for their continued cooperation and support.

FCRBP Advisory Executive Committee 2002-03

At the Program Advisory Committee meeting on January 25, 2002, **Randall J. Wilger** (Wayne Board 6) was reelected chair, and **Mary Lou Blanchard** (Board 17: Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee) was elected vice-chair. Pursuant to the Program Bylaws, Program Manager Tom Kissling appointed **Robert Goldenbogen** (Board 14: Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac, St. Clair) and **Marguerita Ross Price** (Wayne Board 9) to the Executive Committee. Along with **Verlie M. Ruffin**, Associate Director of the Michigan Federation of Private Child & Family Agencies, who is the Program Immediate Past Chair, these five very qualified individuals comprise the Executive Committee for the next two years. A little about each member...

Randy Wilger (Chair) has been a member of Wayne County Board 6 for eleven years. He has served as chair of his board several years and representative to the Advisory Committee for all eleven years. Mr. Wilger is the Business Manager at Wayne State University Law School.

Mary Lou Blanchard (Vice-Chair) is a resident of Jackson County and is beginning her fifth year on Board 17. Ms.

Blanchard was employed in the child welfare system, both within the FIA and private agencies, for many years prior to her retirement.

Bob Goldenbogen (Appointed Member) is a resident of St. Clair County and is beginning his third year on Board 14. Bob is a practicing attorney and prior to serving on the board was a court-appointed attorney for children and parents in neglect proceedings. In his previous court-appointed attorney role, Mr. Goldenbogen often appeared before the board on behalf of his clients.

Rita Price (Appointed Member) is a resident of Wayne County and is beginning her third year on Board 9. Ms. Price has been a foster parent for almost nine years and continues to do so.

Verlie Ruffin (Immediate Past Chair) has served on the Program Advisory Committee almost since its inception. Ms. Ruffin also serves on the National Association of Foster Care Reviewers Board of Directors.

"Mediation Can Help"

Continued from page 1

Mediation has "expediting safe permanency" as its goal and Foster Care Review Boards should use their county's services whenever appropriate.

For more information about the Program and how to use it, or to find out if your county has a Permanency Planning Mediation Program (PPMP) in place, call your local dispute resolution center or Laura Bassein at the State Court Administrative Office, 517/373-4839.



From the Program Manager...

FCRBP Advisory Executive Committee 2002-2004

The Program Advisory Committee includes representatives from each of the thirty boards statewide as well as representatives from the child welfare system appointed by the State Court Administrator. (*See related article*) Leadership within the Advisory Committee is provided by an Executive Committee consisting of the following individuals.

Chairman	Randall J. Wilger	Wayne Board 6
Vice-Chair	Mary Lou Blanchard	Hillsdale/Jackson/Lenawee Board
Im. Past Chair	Verlie Ruffin	Mi Federation of Child & Family Agencies
At-Large	Robert Goldenbogen	Huron/Lapeer/Sanilac/St. Clair Board
At-Large	Marguerita Ross Price	Wayne Board 9

The chair and vice-chair are elected for two year terms by the Advisory Committee at a January meeting. At-Large members are appointed by the Program Manager pursuant to the Advisory Committee by-laws.

The *function of the Executive Committee* is to provide leadership to the activities of the Advisory Committee. This entails setting agendas, following up on issues presented at meetings, clarifying the biennial Program goals, and developing the annual report, just to name a few. Executive Committee members are expected to attend the three regularly scheduled Advisory Committee meetings and three Executive Committee meetings each year. Issues which surface at Advisory Committee meetings are discussed, researched, and acted upon. The Executive Committee often meets with others within the child welfare community. In 2001 this included meetings with Chief Justice Maura D.

Corrigan of the Michigan Supreme Court, Hon. Milton L. Mack Jr., Probate Judges Association President, and State Court Administrator John D. Ferry, Jr. On these occasions, the Executive Committee represents the Advisory Committee and local boards in advocating for children in care.

Executive Committee members have *become premier child advocates* over the years. On occasion, they speak at legislative hearings, represent the Program at seminars and workshops, and have presented at national child welfare conferences. The Executive Committee is a microcosm of the Advisory Committee and the board review system. Using information gleaned from the review process, volunteers work side by side with child welfare professionals to promote the best interests of children and families caught up in the foster care system.

Regardless of where the Executive Committee is reaching out, it always reflects the issues that surface from citizen review. Historically, the Executive Committee has included representatives from local boards as well as professionals from the child welfare system. The Program does not work in a vacuum and past experience validates that working "with" the system rather than "against" it provides better advocacy for children in care. Citizen reviewers are not controlled by the child welfare system or any component of it. However, for citizens to make a difference, they must *be able to work with the professionals* within the system. Both have the same goals and both make a positive difference for kids, families, and services.

Thomas A. Kissling

2002 Advisory Committee

Non-Local-Board Members

The 2002 Program Advisory Committee includes the following non-local-board members who are appointed by the State Court Administrator. These Committee members are representatives of the extended child welfare community and act as resources to the Program. Volunteers serving in this capacity are...

Dr. Gary Anderson	Michigan State University
Ron Apol	Kent County Circuit Court
Deborah T. Dinco	Orchards Children's Services
Robert E. Ennis	Ennis Center for Children
Dr. Kathleen Faller	University of Michigan
Debbie Gaffney	Former Kent County Board Member
James Goodwin	Whaley Children's Center
Mary Johnson	Wayne County Circuit Court
Hon. Sheila Gibson Manning ...	Wayne County Circuit Court
Myrna McNitt	Mi Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
JoAnne Nagy	Mi Family Independence Agency



Charles Orr	Wayne County Family Independence Agency
Carolyn Rayford	Evergreen Children's Center
Verlie M. Ruffin	Mi Federation of Private Child & Family Agencies
Loren Snippe	Ottawa County Family Independence Agency
Hon. Lowell R. Ulrich	Chippewa County Probate Court

GREATER LOVE... Profiling Wilhelmina Cotton, Wayne Board 7

by Jim Novell

In the scriptures we are instructed to love our neighbor as our self, and that no greater love has a person than to lay down his life for a friend. Nowhere else, in any aspect of life, do I see these principles practiced more than in the efforts of foster and adoptive parents of abused and neglected children, children who by virtue of their behavior are not easily incorporated into a family setting without severe disruption to that family and significant sacrifices by its members.

Wilhelmina Cotton and her family are prime examples of this selfless love. In 1987, after successfully raising their own three children, Wilhelmina and her husband Henry opened their home and their hearts to care for children who needed love and acceptance. Since that time their family has provided long term foster care to nineteen children, adopted three of them, and provided respite foster care for numerous children from other foster and adoptive homes. Upon experiencing the many challenges of working with an undermanned, under supported foster care system, Wilhelmina became an activist and advocate for foster and adoptive parents and children. In 1996 she completed training in the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE Program, which

allowed her formal opportunities to train, mentor, and encourage other foster and adoptive parents. She became a member of the National Foster Parent Association, and served on the Board of Directors of the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (MFAPA) for six years. Two of those years were served on their Executive Committee. Wilhelmina became vice chair of her Review Board in May of 1998 and has continued in that role since then. In November of 2001, Wilhelmina's and Henry's efforts were recognized officially when they were awarded the MFAPA's prestigious Elsie Brown-Daisy Franks Award, which honored their contribution to improving adoption in Michigan.

Children enter foster care today with an increasing need for love, nurture and support, as well as experiences that can help them heal from their own traumatic family experiences. Experience and research has proven that these children are best served within families that will accept and love them. We congratulate Wilhelmina and Henry on receiving their recent honor, as well as for their fifty years of marriage spent together loving and nurturing their own children, and many children from our community.

Wilger Response to FIA Zone 3 Managers

[Editorial Note: The FIA Zone 3 Managers sent a letter to the FCRBP regarding the picture of Miracle Jackson on the cover of the 2000 Program Annual Report. The following is Advisory Committee Chairman Randall J. Wilger's response.]

Thank you for your candid letter dated February 25, 2002 to Thomas A. Kissling regarding the Michigan Citizen's Foster Care Review Board Program 2000 Annual Report. As Chairperson for the Program's Advisory Committee, it was my recommendation to use the photograph of Miracle Jackson. I am sorry to learn that you felt it to be disrespectful of FIA. Were our roles reversed, perhaps I would feel as you do. It was not our intent to be disrespectful of FIA or to offend anyone. Yet, due to the controversial nature of the picture, we understood that there would likely be some who would be offended.

As you point out in your letter, the recommendations contained within the report are supportive of many of your own concerns. I believe this has generally been the case with our annual reports for the past fourteen years. However, those reports and their recommendations have been largely ignored by decision makers.

Legislation requiring FIA and Community Health to develop a means of identifying children born into families where parents' rights had been terminated was signed into law in December of 1997. Early in 1999 members of the Foster Care Review Board recognized that no such system had yet been

implemented. This issue was raised with administrative personnel at FIA. We were told that the databases of the two organizations were incompatible and thus could not communicate with one another. Little did any of us realize what deadly consequences would follow. Tragically, Miracle Jackson lost her life.

Last November, one hundred and sixty-five citizen volunteers with the Foster Care Review Board Program hand-carried copies of the 2000 Annual Report to their State Senators and Representatives. Our message to them was that real children, like Miracle, suffer and sometimes die when adequate resources are not allocated to child welfare. As citizens and voters, we reminded our legislators that their budgetary actions do have consequences. We believe our Annual Report was an effective tool for this purpose. For the most part, our volunteers were well received and law makers expressed interest in hearing of their concerns. Follow-up meetings are currently being planned.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that it was not our intent to offend or be disrespectful of the FIA or its staff. Our intent was to present a report to the Governor and the Legislature that would positively impact State resources devoted to Michigan's Child Welfare System. Our goal is to work collaboratively with others in the system to promote the best interests of children in care.

Foster Care Review as a Quality Improvement Tool

by Kevin Sherman

For many years now, the Michigan Foster Care Review Board Program has provided key stakeholders with relevant information, recommendations and data about individual wards and groups of children in out-of-home care through regular and timely reviews. This information has been based on foster care reviews held around the state.

At the last several Advisory Committee meetings, board members have asked the difficult questions: "Are we having an impact on the child welfare system here in Michigan?" "How can we measure our outcomes?" To answer these questions one must remember the foster care review boards monitor foster care practice. The performance targets used to monitor case practice closely follow the Safe Passage to Permanency, Guidelines for Foster Care Review, National Association of Foster Care Reviewers. These performance targets should be consistent with the "standards to ensure quality services" as required by P.L. 105-98, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

What are these performance targets or standards for foster care practice? These targets or standards for foster care

practice describe actions and behaviors essential for achieving safety, permanency, and well-being. (Ibid., pg B-4) How are they measured? How does one define measurable case activities most likely to produce the desired outcome? How does one define methods that are measurable to determine if progress is being made toward the desired outcomes for children and their families?

Recently, the Michigan Foster Care Review Board Program approached Dr. Gary Anderson, Program Advisory Committee Member and Director of the Michigan State University School of Social Work with these questions. In the near future we will be consulting with the University to address our concerns and other issues related to our Program using the data we collect from reviews. We are hopeful that our collaboration will lead to assisting our Program in analyzing trends and forecasting change in the various interventions to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in care and their families. Stay tuned for more information.

WELCOME NEW BOARD VOLUNTEERS

Allegan County — Vivien Vandenberg
Antrim County — Sharon Larrance
Berrien County — Steven Sowder
Calhoun County — Janet Collins, Michael Galloway
Clinton County — Frederick Puffenberger
Crawford County — Lawrence Moore
Eaton County — Carol Little
Ingham County — Lanny Dittmer
Iosco County — Margaret deHeus
Isabella County — Sue Sazima
Kalkaska County — Mary Lou Bonacci
Lake County — Elizabeth Stamper
Lenawee County — Robert Greenwood
Macomb County — James Kelly
Midland County — Carla Braun, Dolores Porte
Newaygo County — Larry Feikema
Saginaw County — Barbara Hill
St. Joseph County — Edward Williams
Van Buren County — Dean Beckwith
Wayne County — Charlene Batchelor, Donna Denson, George Eason, Shelley Foy, Emily Frascaroli, Darik Johnson, Floyd Myers, Teri Mingus, Lawrence Patrick Jr., Tracy Smith

Program Staff Email Addresses

Thomas A. Kissling, Manager
kisslingt@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Brenda Baker, Program Representative
bakerb@jud.state.mi.us — Detroit

Colleen Bethea, Program Assistant
betheac@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Theresa Cross, Program Assistant
crosst@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Robin Ellis, Program Assistant
ellisr@jud.state.mi.us — Gaylord

Sharon Fox, Program Assistant
foxs@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Roderick Johnson, Program Representative
johnsonr@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Earlester Monroe, Program Assistant
monroe@jud.state.mi.us — Detroit

James Novell, Program Representative
novellj@jud.state.mi.us — Detroit

Angel Pierce, Program Assistant
pierce@jud.state.mi.us — Detroit

Gayle Robbert, Program Representative
robbertg@jud.state.mi.us — Lansing

Kevin Sherman, Program Representative
shermank@jud.state.mi.us — Gaylord

Foster Care Review Board Program
P.O. Box 30048
Lansing, MI 48909

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The Michigan
**Foster Care Review
Board Program**
is administered by the
State Court Administrative Office
of the
Michigan Supreme Court

309 North Washington Square
P.O. Box 30048
Lansing, Michigan 48909
(517) 373-1956

Cadillac Place
3034 W. Grand Blvd., Ste. 8-400
Detroit, Michigan 48202
(313) 456-0645

P.O. Box 9
Gaylord, Michigan 49735
(989) 732-0494

The FCRBP Newsletter
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Program Advisory Committee

Thomas A. Kissling
Program Manager
Editor

Foster Care Review Board Program/SCAO
Michigan Supreme Court
www.courts.michigan.gov

